ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A chimeric, carboxy-terminal truncated hepatitis B virus nucleocapsid protein (HBc) is disclosed that is engineered for both enhanced stability of self-assembled particles and the display of an immunogenic epitope. The immunogenic epitope is peptide-bonded to one or more of the N-terminus, in the immunogenic loop or at the C-terminus of HBc, whereas the enhanced stability of self-assembled particles is obtained by the presence of at least one heterologous cysteine residue near the aminio-terminus of the chimer molecule. Methods of making and using the chimers are also disclosed.